

Abstract:

Thamel is a neighborhood invested with a variety of divergent cultural imaginaries. With few exceptions (e.g., Liechty 1996, Thapa 2016), the neighborhood remains tethered to its touristic reputation in both popular and academic discourse. Paying particular attention to Nepali youth consumers, this research explores some of the alternative ways in which users engage with and experience the space. Bringing together theoretical frameworks examining globalization, critical human geography, and mobilities, the talk examines the role of emplacement in globalization and cultural transformation. Beyond its undeniable role as a receptacle for foreign tourists, Thamel also functions as a node in the transnational circulation of Nepalis across the globe. From London to Hong Kong to Chiang Mai, Australia to Finland to the United States, Thamel often serves as a cosmopolitan referent within the Nepali diaspora, and the space itself is continually reproduced by these selfsame linkages. This talk highlights the role of Nepali agents in these processes to counter-balance the neighborhood's widespread reputation as merely a *kuire* place. This perspective raises several relevant issues: the ongoing contestation over Thamel's meaning, the cultural-political stakes of that contestation, and the agency of Nepalis in the (re)production of the neighborhood. The intersecting registers of age, gender, nationality, caste, and class deeply impact one's experience and imaginary of the neighborhood. Attending to varied practices of consumption, hustling, travel, and sociality, this talk discusses the way in which subjects continuously transform a space that, in turn, transforms them and radiates into the broader cultural landscape of Kathmandu.